AN AUSTRALIAN RECOLLECTION OF A RAILROAD MODELLING LIFE – GRAEME BARNES *MMR*

Early life as a modeller

Knowing the moment we became interested in modelling railways and railroads is hard to determine, particularly when we were young. In my pre-teens I was gifted a wind-up locomotive with rollingstock and a circle of steel HO track; much like many other children. I had a pet budgerigar that happily rode in one of the open wagons, my first passenger! My memory of the budgie in the wagon was imprinted into my psyche. Why wouldn't I retain the memory of my first train?

About 15 years later I built my first layout on a simple 1.2 x 2.4m board, running HO European prototype trains. I moved into N scale with north American rollingstock, and also some special European named trains. I acquired a remarkably beautiful N scale Crocodile during a visit to Cologne in 1975.

Like all lifelong modellers, other events in life take control – marriage and work. My early career as an agricultural scientist changed into many other and diverse pursuits; general manager for a golf company, I owned and managed an advertising agency for a while, small business consulting (including a model railroad business), and then moved into the diving industry for some years.

Deciding to move back into agriculture I purchased a number of properties across central NSW. For the next 25 years I produced prime cattle and grain, but my real focus was breeding bulls for commercial and stud cattlemen. I sold bulls to buyers in northern Australia and down into the southern states and offshore islands. I exported bull genetics and embryos to New Zealand, Brasil, the USA and Canada. Not much time for rail modelling, but I did manage to maintain a peripheral interest at every opportunity. I joined a small but very active regional club about 250km from home. This gave me the impetus to maintain my modelling interest. I am still a member even though I live nearly 600km from the club rooms in Armidale.

Then I had children. We were married for 17 years and both about 40 years old. Two boys – you beauty, future model railroaders!

Becoming serious about rail modelling

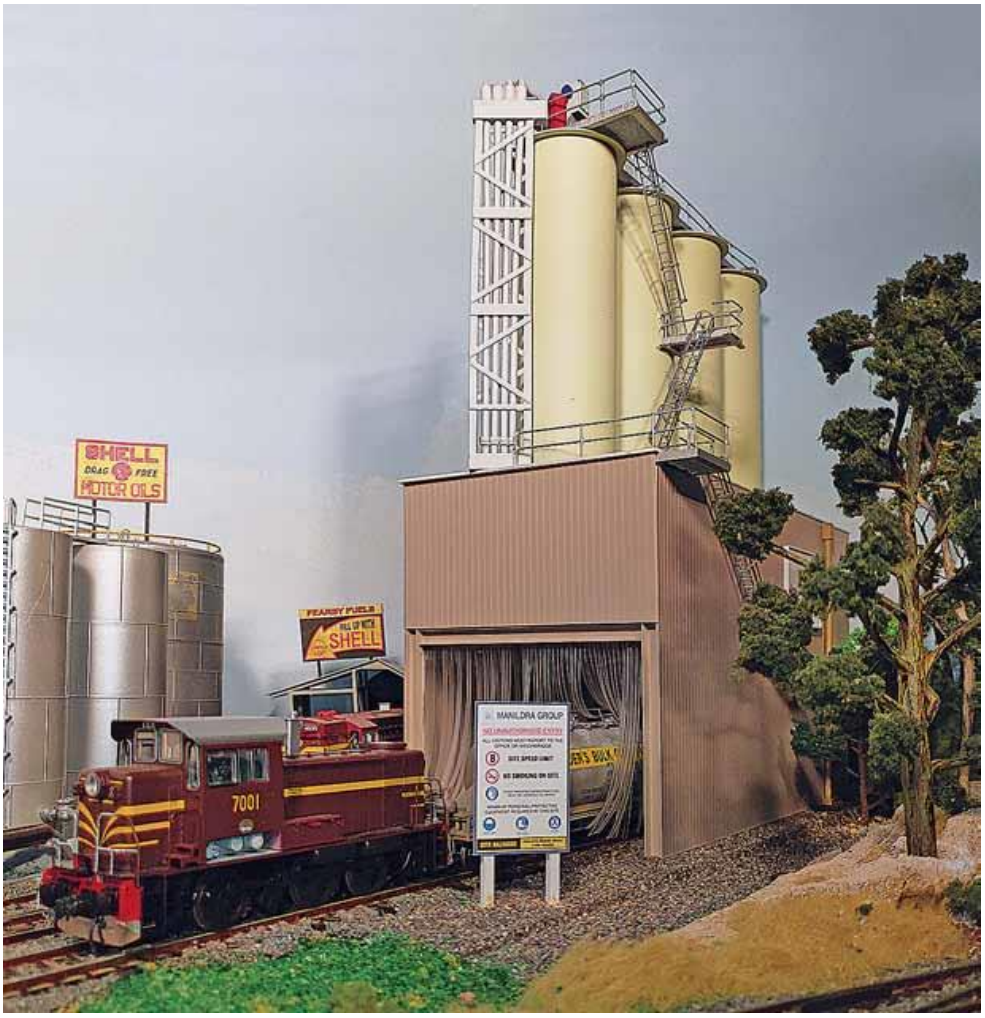
From about the late 1990's the modelling scene in Australia became more comprehensive and accessible. An increase in manufacturers producing HO Australian and particularly NSW

prototypes gave us wider choice of locomotives and rollingstock. NSW steam and diesels were readily available. The NSW 60 class Beyer-Garratt could be purchased off the shelf, along with named passenger trains. My interest was piqued, I would sell all my N scale stock and become an Australian HO modeller.

I sold all my livestock and rural properties by 2010, and moved off-property to a regional town of 10000 people. Since then I have built an ore mining layout, an exhibition layout and now in my new home of five years, commenced a reasonable size permanent layout. I was able to devote more time to my modelling interests. Before shifting to my current home I was only 200km from clubrooms in Armidale and became more involved in the activities of the club. I wrote articles for the club newsletter and the modelling press in Australia. Even though there were more and more RTR models available, I scratch built rollingstock and structures.

To confound my railroad interests I re-educated as a trainer and assessor in tertiary agricultural education. From 2014 until late 2022 I trained young and old people in all facets of agriculture. Unfortunately this took time away from my hobby, but it was rewarding to see people I trained moving forward with their careers.

About 20 years ago I started producing plans for layouts for friends and for every room in our house (we had an eight bedroom home). Since then this skill became a commercial success – *Track Planning Services*. I design original layouts for model railroaders across Australia. Depending on the commission, plans are for prototype or freelance railroading in all scales. Recently I designed plans for a client in north America of a prototype Colorado rail line. After many years of designing, clients that have built layouts from my plans are returning for another design for larger layouts.



Scratch built flour silos of *Manildra Grains* in Gunnedah NSW. Flour carrying tank cars are shunted through the loading bay. Curtains at each end keep flour dust within the loading bay. The sign was created from a photo of the real sign at the entrance to the silos. This structure was an important model on a previous exhibition layout.

Mittagong station is an historic building on the main line in the Southern Highlands between Sydney and Melbourne. The model is heavily kit bashed and partially scratch built to represent the station and townscape.

Built in the 1860's Picton viaduct is a double track mainline stone bridge still in service. The model is a heavily kit bashed single lane stone bridge.

Current Rail Modelling

I moved to a new home on the Southern Highlands of NSW in May 2019. My move to the Highlands resulted in a home with a large garage which I recognised as being negotiable for another layout. I would build a covered structure to house our cars but negotiations stalled when I agreed that leaving the cars outside in our cold weather was not ideal. A fresh approach was needed and I offered to build a shed on our large block. Idea accepted! After 18 months of applications and then construction I have a 7.5 x 15m shed, fully lined and air conditioned.

I designed a layout for the shed, after creating a separate workshop of 7.5 x 5m at one end. Final area for the layout is 7.5 x 10m or 75m². The layout room has space for work benches and comfortable chairs for musing about better modelling.

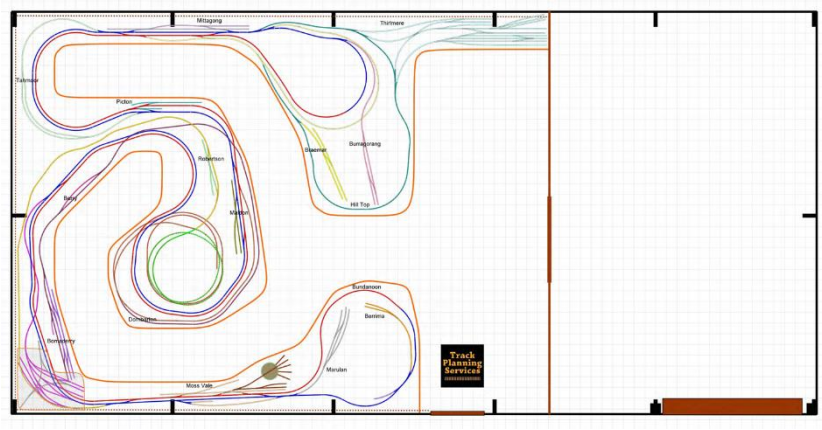
The plan is based on rail lines in my part of the world. Running through the district is the double track main line between Sydney and Melbourne (about 950km apart). The original single main line was constructed in the late 1860's. This line is now partially used as a tourist line from the nearby NSW Rail Transport Museum. The old line is 50m from my front door. There are other tracks

in the region used for freight traffic. The main lines, some terminating lines and freight offshoots over the escarpment to the coast are the themes of my layout.

The layout is an around the wall, walk-in type with grades in various parts to emulate particular parts of the prototype. Maximum grade is about 2.5% and total track length is about 250m. Essentially the plan is a single loop that simulates double track for most of its continuous trackage. There are many terminating and loop type parts, leading to industries such as mining, cement works, concrete sleeper manufacturing, orchards, milk, shale mining and more. A seaport is located on the lowest part of the layout. Although fictitious the seaport provides opportunity for industries such as fishing and container movements.

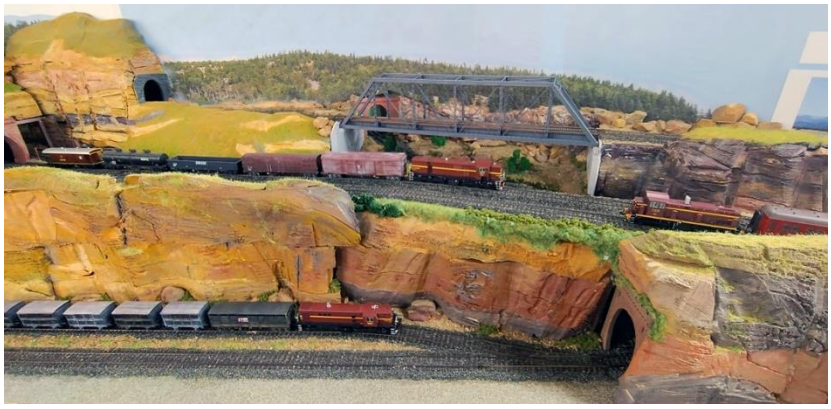
Layout construction commenced April 2022. The construction plan is to build modules and lay track in limited parts, completing landscape before moving forwards with more modules and track. This does not give a fully traversable layout at the outset but it does ensure that discrete parts of the layout are completed before moving forward. I estimate another five years will be needed for a complete and landscaped layout.

In the meantime I sold the exhibition layout to a disabled modeller and resurrected a helix constructed previously for the mining layout described earlier. This is an eccentric helix designed into the new layout to raise track from the south coast to the Highlands (about 1000m in real height). The design and construction of the helix was featured in my article in the *Australian Model Railway Magazine* (AMRM).



Design for the current layout in a shed with workshop and car access at one end. Area for the layout is 75m².
The bench edge is coloured orange. The Main Lines are coloured blue and red. The staging or storage/shunting yards are in the top right corner. A shale mining area is elevated above track in the bottom left corner. A helix in green near centre of the layout.

A typical 1955 rural scene on the Loop Line running past my front door. A DMU rail car or *"Tin Hare"* with trailer is hauling a GT van used for luggage. The cutting behind the train was excavated in the 1860's. It is the deepest rail cutting in Australia.



Near the highest part of the layout, trains pass on the main lines and below on terminating country lines. The high sandstone cuttings are typical of eastern NSW.

Not far from my home is a concrete sleeper manufacturing plant. The factory is located on the original single main line, accessed from the nearby double track main line at Mittagong.

The road to achieving MMR

I joined the NMRA in October 2015. I like the idea of a volunteer organisation wanting to improve accessibility and uniformity of technical components of the hobby by creating standards and practices. The NMRA also offers individual advancement in the hobby through education and identification of skills. Recognising measurable achievements leads to greater personal satisfaction for the individual and creates a coterie of skilled modellers able to mentor other members in the hobby.

During my modelling and layout construction efforts I keep notes about projects and take photos during the progress of these projects. Since my efforts to plan and build an ore railway in a bedroom from 2005 I have meticulously kept records of work undertaken to build locos, rollingstock, structures, electrical work, modules for layout construction and more. At the time I envisaged I would use this information to help and improve future projects. My background in writing scientific and technical articles, and use of graphic tools in my time in the advertising agency meant that I would also be prepared to share information and knowledge I accrued in the hobby. Eventually I shared this knowledge by writing articles for various rail hobby publications and making presentations at model railroad events.

For each track planning client I write a narrative for their new railroad. This encompasses information about setting up for construction, a tour around their layout, grade and elevation, curve radius and locating track and turnouts on the plan, inventories for the design, description of sections of their plan and other information depending on the size and complexity of the design. I have a vast store of this information from the past two decades.

My path to submitting applications for the *Achievement Program* to attain *Master Model Railroader®* commenced in a cold winter in July 2020. I was on mid-year vacation from teaching. During a week of intense collation of information, photos, live presentations and many other documents, I wrote all seven required AP applications over five days. I created a template cover sheet for each AP and included all required pieces of information into a single document for ease of review.

My involvement with the NMRA has grown. I was invited to be part of the committee organising the 2023 Australian NMRA National Convention *"Rails at Rosehill"*. I arranged the layout tours for the three days either side of the convention and gave a presentation on track planning during the convention. In my short time with the NMRA the convention brought me into contact with many members. This experience, and monthly meetings has shown me there is a wealth of member talent. Many members are partially aware of their talents, but some do not know the quality of their skills.

I am overtly encouraging members to take stock of their talents. All members and particularly MMR members, have a role of mentoring to increase awareness of capacity, to prepare and complete the AP system. Encouraging members to aim for MMR is a worthwhile goal for the individual and the hobby.